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ABSTRACT

Interviews, program documents, progress reports supplied by the secondary itinerant teacher, and results of a questionnaire survey conducted by the itinerant teacher provided information for a brief, interim evaluation of the Secondary Itinerant Teacher Service. The service has endeavored to help all students (including adults) enrolled with the Secondary Correspondence School (SCS): it dates from August 1977 and has had a staff of 1 secondary teacher, specializing in math and science, who is responsible for the whole of the South-West Priority Country Area (320,000 km squared). In comparison with the Primary Itinerant Teacher Service, the secondary itinerant teacher appears to have achieved a higher proportion of student contact time, presumably because more secondary students are grouped in urban centers; nevertheless, survey results suggest that most students would like one visit every four weeks, or twice the number they are receiving. Opinions expressed in the survey of students and Home Supervisors and in the comments of SCS staff, support the view of the secondary itinerant teacher that the service has been well received. Benefits perceived by SCS staff include higher student retention rates, better work, and improved return of papers. Overall, there appears to be a good case for continuing development of the service upon the lines already established. (JH)

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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM EVALUATION SERIES

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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM EVALUATION SERIES: REPORT NO. 2

The Secondary Itinerant Teacher Service in South-West Queensland

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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report provides a brief appraisal of the secondary itinerant teacher service. It trials a style of reporting which, if acceptable, could provide faster, first instance coverage of a range of P.C.A.P. projects. The approach is selective rather than comprehensive and, in view of the quality and range of data, findings are tentative rather than conclusive.

Sources of information were:

(a) Interviews with P.C.A.P. field staff, staff at the Secondary Correspondence School and the Project Director.

(b) Examination of files in the Charleville and Brisbane P.C.A.P. offices.

(c) Progress reports supplied by the secondary intinerant and the results of a questionnaire survey which he conducted. (His co-operation in making this survey data freely available is gratefully acknowledged).

BACKGROUND TO THE SERVICE

The secondary component of the P.C.A.P. Itinerant Teacher Service dates from August 1977. Apart from a short period at the beginning, the staff has consisted of one secondary teacher, specialising in the maths/science area. When this original itinerant returned to a school posting at the beginning of 1979 he was replaced by another teacher with a similar specialist background.

The secondary itinerant is based in Charleville and has the option of sharing two P.C.A.P. vehicles with four other field staff or of using his own vehicle at the usual rates of reimbursement. He is responsible for supplying a service throughout the whole of the South-West Priority Country Area (320 000 km^2).

PURPOSE OF THE SERVICE

This was stated in the P.C.A.P. annual report for 1977 as:

- "to assist Home Supervisors with the education of secondary children on Correspondence Education.
- to assist teachers in small primary schools which either retain a Grade 8 class or have children on secondary correspondence attending them."

In practice, a somewhat wider role has been developed, as described under Teacher Activities below. Since the service is intended to supplement, not replace, existing educational provisions this role has to take account of the absence of other support services, such as those available at primary level through the School of the Air and the Isolated Children's Special Education Unit.

The service has endeavoured to help all students, including adults, enrolled with the Secondary Correspondence School (hereafter S.C.S.).

STUDENT NUMBERS

At the start of 1978 there were 77 students in the South-West area enrolled with the S.C.S. A breakdown of enrolments during the year is shown below:

Month	School Age		Adult		Total Students
	Town	Property	Town	Property	
June	28 (39%)	9 (13%)	28 (39%)	6 (8%)	71
October	25 (51%)	14 (29%)	9 (18%)	1 (2%)	49

Although the high student retention rate of 92% (71 out of 77) for the first six months fell later in the year, it remained above average for the state. (N.B. The net loss in enrolments was confined to adult students).

A high proportion (June 78%, October 69%) of students was located in towns and a significant proportion (most of the school age, town students) was school-based.

Because of reducing enrolment, the staff/student ratio varied from 1:77 to 1:49, compared to an average of 1:40 throughout the year for the primary itinerant service.

ALLOCATION OF TIME

This table compares how the secondary and primary itinerants spent their time during 1978:

Secondary Itinerants		Primary Itinerants	
Activity	Percentage of Time	Activity	Percentage of Time
Travel	30	Home Visits *	31
Office	19	Office	45
S.C.S. Visits	8	Mini schools *	11
School Visits	14	Summer Schools	8
Student Visits	29	Miscellaneous	5

* includes travelling time.

The primary itinerants used office time to write reports for the Primary Correspondence School so for purposes of comparison the secondary itinerant's office time could be added to time spent at the S.C.S. to give a total of 27%. (The Charleville primary itinerants were aiming to reduce their office time to approx. 25%; but had been hampered by bad weather during 1978).

The secondary itinerant's records show that during first term 1978 he worked, on average, 40.7 hours weekly and travelled, on average, 862 km.

STUDENT CONTACT

152 contacts were made during first term, with an average of 2 per student; repeated contacts in one week being counted as a single contact. The bulk of the contacts were through visits, although the telephone was also used. In all, 74 students (96%) were contacted.

During the second half of the year there was more emphasis on visiting individuals and less on schools. Each student was contacted, on average, 6 times during the year, with some attempt to arrange visits according to need.

TEACHER ACTIVITIES

In his first report for 1978 the secondary itinerant supplied the following description of his duties:

"The role of Secondary Itinerant has many aspects, some of which are:

1. Contacting a student (which can be difficult);
2. Ensuring continuation of student in his studies, including modifications of enrolments;
3. Linking students to local assistance and facilities, e.g. most adults are reluctant to approach a school;
4. Explaining aspects of the content of correspondence notes, explaining corrections, and assisting with papers to be submitted;
5. Teaching content of courses independently of notes, providing practical work in science and biology, and providing films, slides, etc. which would not normally be available;
6. Ensuring that the correct notes, etc. are being used by the student, and also that the required notes have been mailed to the student;
7. Providing a personal communications link between the student and his correspondence teacher (and vice versa) and discussing progress, etc. – personalising correspondence studies;
8. Providing general information about correspondence subjects, career requirements, exam entry, etc.;
9. Acting in an advisory and supportive capacity to parents and primary teachers who supervise (secondary) students;
10. Acting in an advisory and supportive capacity to science teachers in the secondary schools who, with the exception of Roma and Charleville, are in their first or second year of teaching".

In his final report, the secondary itinerant commented that the role outlined above remained true, but visits became longer and more effective as the student/teacher relationship developed. He also mentioned that "Itinerant teachers need to know mathematics – the major problem area ".

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SECONDARY CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

Through regular visits to Brisbane, the secondary itinerant has developed a role in relation to the S.C.S. which includes:

(a) Providing oral reports on students.

(b) Supplying information about student environments, in particular, and the South-West area, in general.

(c) Acting as trouble-shooter in cases where difficulties arise.

(d) Providing a personal link between students and the S.C.S.

(e) Providing critical feedback on S.C.S. courses.

The Supervisor of the S.C.S. had no doubts about the value of the itinerant service and described it as:

"An essential part of correspondence education ".

The itinerant's visits to the S.C.S. are considered particularly helpful by S.C.S. staff.

All 16 teachers interviewed at the S.C.S. were also agreed on the overall value of the service; 5 perceived a significant improvement in student performance and 3 perceived a significant improvement in the return of papers.

REACTIONS TO THE SERVICE

The secondary itinerant supplied the following comments:

"Students react cautiously at first to visits; they are used to working alone and it takes a few visits before best working is achieved.

Students are very interested in 'enrichment' materials which are brought along (e.g. slides, books, experiments). These are materials readily available to a student in a secondary school.

Parents are concerned about the progress of their children and seek support and reassurance.

The adults look forward to having someone to talk to about their study.

Teachers visited were keen to discuss all aspects of their work ".

From his questionnaire survey, (51% return rate), the secondary itinerant reached the following conclusions:

"81% of students answering found visits either 'very helpful' or, 'usually helpful'.

Most would like to see an itinerant once a month. (56%)

Supervisors are very pleased to see an itinerant ".

Although the response rate to the survey was only 50%, an examination of the data reveals no reason to suppose that the respondents represent an atypical group.

The Supervisor stated that feedback reaching the S.C.S. about the itinerant service was entirely favourable.

The Project Director has commented that the itinerant's visits to high school teachers may have been the least valuable component of the serivce.

PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

With a single itinerant responsible for the whole South-West area, distance inevitably becomes a problem and 30% of his time was spent in travelling over 30 000 km during 1978.

Because of the limited availability of P.C.A.P. transport in Charleville (2 vehicles for 5 staff), the secondary itinerant had, reluctantly, to make frequent use of his own vehicle and received over $3000 in car allowance for 1978.

The quality of assistance which the service can offer in any particular subject area is dependent upon the professional background of the itinerant teacher involved. With only one itinerant, the number of areas where specialist advice can be offered is necessarily limited.

During first term 1978 an average of 2 contacts per student was achieved in a 14-week period. Since some of these contacts were by telephone, the number of visits is unlikely to have exceeded an average of 1 every 8 weeks, compared to the rate of 1 visit every 4 weeks desired by over 50% of students.

As with other similar itinerant positions, the duties are seen by staff as exhausting, involving long hours, and curtailing private life. There is some feeling that this receives inadequate recognition.

CONCLUSION

In comparison with the Primary Itinerant Teacher Service, the secondary itinerant appears to have achieved a higher degree of student contact time. This is presumably related to the greater ease of access associated with the high proportion (70–80%) of students grouped in urban centres. Nevertheless, survey results suggest that most students would like more frequent visits, preferably one every four weeks.

With a staff of only one, the teacher/student ratio of the secondary component of the Itinerant Teacher Service has been less favourable than that of the primary component (in the order of 1:70 compared to 1:40). On the other hand, the number of school-age S.C.S. students in the area suggests that teacher/Home Supervisor ratios are probably much the same.

Although the present arrangement makes professional assistance of a general nature available to any S.C.S. student in the South-West, the use of a single itinerant limits the number of areas in which specialist subject advice can be offered.

The co-operation of the Department of Education in making available a permanently employed teacher to fill the role of secondary itinerant appears to have avoided the problem of staff instability which has continued to affect the Primary Itinerant Teacher Service.

Opinions expressed in the survey of students and Home Supervisors, and in the comments of S.C.S. staff, supported the view of the secondary itinerant that the service had been well-received. Benefits perceived by S.C.S. staff included higher student retention rates, better work and improved return of papers.

Overall, there appears to be a good case for continuing development of the service upon the lines already established.

ISSUES

Experience suggests that the secondary itinerant cannot efficiently share existing transport with other Charleville-based staff. It follows that either he must be left to provide his own transport for much of the time, or consideration must be given to basing an additional vehicle in Charleville.

At present, students appear to be receiving approximately 50% of the desired number of visits, and specialist advice is confined principally to the maths/science areas. Any increase in the quantity and quality of service would require additional staff, with a corresponding increase in transport requirements.

At present, the secondary itinerant service is restricted to the South-West Priority Country Area and there is, for instance, no equivalent or alternative service for secondary correspondence students in the Central Area. Any extension of the service into other areas would require additional staff and vehicles.

Finally it must be stressed that this is a brief report, based on a limited range of data, and that to complete a full and reliable evaluation of the service further investigation is desirable.

S. R. HAMPSON, Government Printer, Queensland